

1. **Lesson 1. For Teachers:** Please have the students read the sentences one at a time and correct their pronunciation of each sentence then have them repeat after you. Wait until after they read the sentence (use the number in place of the missing word) to have the students choose the correct answer to fill in the blank. When the students finish the article, move on to the further questions.

2. In 1347, as Italian merchants made their way back from the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea, rats aboard their ships slipped out into the port cities along the Mediterranean. The devastating plague the animals carried, known today as the Black Death, ravaged Europe for the next five years. In England alone, historians estimate that up to 40 percent of the population of about six million people perished as a result. Even after the initial outbreak, periodic waves of the plague continue to decimate communities, wiping out any population growth for more than 100 years.
3. Many historians view the pandemic as a catalyst for the end of England's feudal society, in which most land—the chief signifier of wealth—was owned by a powerful ruling class that included kings, nobility, the church and the rural aristocracy. Under this feudal system, peasant laborers were allowed to live on and cultivate land but had virtually no political or economic power. They were forced to cede a large percentage of their harvest to the landowners. This, along with the onerous taxes imposed by the king, kept laborers trapped in subsistence poverty.

4. **Further Questions**\*Ask student to answer the question on their own at first. If the student can't answer correctly, have him look at the last page and read the "example answer" for the question. Have the student try to memorize the answer, if it's too long or difficult, you should divide the sentence into 2 or 3 parts to make it easier to remember. Once they have memorized the answer, the teacher should ask the question one last time so that the student can practice answering. Also if you find any mistakes, please mark the page and let me know ASAP.

5. **1) How many people died from the Black Death in England?**

*In England, historians estimate that up to 40 percent of the population of about six million people perished. (About 2.4 million people.)*

6. **2) What kept laborers trapped in subsistence poverty?**

*They were forced to cede a large percentage of their harvest to the land owners and onerous taxes imposed by the king.*

7. As the Black Death swept across the country, however, it evened the playing field, striking down rich and poor alike. It devastated entire towns, families, and religious institutions, and left in its wake vast amounts of untended land. As the agricultural labor pool diminished, surviving landowners found themselves competing for the labor of peasants, who began to demand cash wages and better working conditions. Many rural workers abandoned their agrarian lifestyles to roam the land as hired hands, offering their services to the highest bidder. Still others improved their standard of living by taking up skilled labor in urban areas. In England, wages rose between 12 percent and 28 percent in the first few post-plague years. By the 1360s, they were up 40 percent, sometimes spiking higher at peak harvest season. According to historian David Routt, "A

recalcitrant peasantry, diminished dues and services, and climbing wages undermined the material foundation of the noble lifestyle, jostled the aristocratic sense of proper social hierarchy, and invited a response.”

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## 8. Further Questions

### 9. 3) How did the Black Death even out the playing field?

10. *It struck down rich and poor alike. It devastated entire towns, families and religious institutions, and left in its wake vast amount of untended land.*

### 11. 4) What did many rural workers do?

12. *They abandoned their agrarian lifestyles to roam the land as hired hands, offering their services to the highest bidder.*

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13. Indeed, a response followed. In an attempt to maintain the pre-plague status quo and contain rising wages, members of the elite class resorted to coercion. Peasants were kept in their place—literally and figuratively—by a statute that confined them to their landowners’ holdings and prohibited wage increases. Additionally, exorbitant fees were demanded in exchange for freedom. In other cases, rural lords focused less on maintaining control of their peasants and more on adapting to changing circumstances. Some landowners, for example, shifted to industries that depended less on labor, such as sheep and cattle grazing. Sales of raw wool burgeoned into a full-fledged textile industry, setting the state for the industrial revolution.

14. Peasant women, widowed or orphaned by the plague in astounding numbers, also experienced new levels of wealth and independence. Before the plague, they had enjoyed equality of function, if not status; they were able to farm land, and they made up a large portion of the workforce in trade such as spinning and textiles. Thus, they naturally shared in the rise in wages that followed the plague. Because skilled labor was in short supply, they were also able to find employment as smiths and carpenters—jobs that had traditionally been reserved for men.

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### 15. 5) How were peasants kept in their place?

16. *A statute confined them to their landowner’s holdings and prohibited wage increases. Additionally, exorbitant fees were demanded in exchange for freedom.*

### 17. 6) What happened because of a shortage of skilled labor?

18. *Women were able to find employment as smiths and carpenters—jobs that had traditionally been reserved for men.*

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19. Noblewomen, however did not gain the same degree of independence. After the plague tore through England, there were many unskilled and unprepared female orphans left with estates of considerable value. They quickly became the target of unscrupulous suitors who sought access to their rich dowries. Marriage rates soared. Predatory exploitation of wealthy orphans was so widespread, in fact, that authorities introduced laws requiring a relative’s consent for a female orphan to marry.

20. Some historians even attribute the rise of the English language to the Black Death. For three centuries, English had been relegated to commoners, while the

clergy spoke Latin, and the ruling classes mostly used French. When the plague hit, the sick typically sought out the clergy for spiritual guidance, and often infected them in the process. Church leaders began to induct laymen to top up their shrinking members. As these new priests were drawn from the mostly illiterate masses, the church was forced to conduct business in the language of the people.

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21. **Further Questions**

22. **7) What did authorities do in order to combat the predatory exploitation of wealthy orphans?**

23. *They introduced laws requiring a relative's consent for a female orphan to marry.*

24. **8) Why did the Catholic Church have to conduct their business in English?**

25. *Church leaders began to induct laymen who were drawn from the mostly illiterate masses.*

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26. As the peasant class gained power and influence in society, the use of their language became more prevalent, and in 1362 English replaced French as the official language of England. The Black Death had changed the country forever a society that had been strictly divided into three distinct groups—the nobility, the clergy, and the peasants—was turned on its head, opening the way for the enormous social, religious, and political changes that followed.

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27. **Further Questions**

29. **9) What happened in 1362?**

30. *English replaced French as the official language of England.*

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31. **\*Choose the correct answer from these choices.**

32. **(38) According to the author of the passage, what is true of the fourteenth-century feudal system that existed in England?**

- 1 Peasant laborers were more severely affected by the plague than landowners were due to the land-cultivation practices the feudal system encouraged.
33. **2** Peasant laborers had to give up such a large share of their crops to landowners that it was impossible for them to accumulate wealth.
34. **3** Ruling-class members did not believe peasant laborers made a notable contribution to their wealth and therefore felt justified in not paying them.
35. **4** Landowners tried to avoid sharing any of the profits from crops harvested by peasant laborers with other members of the ruling class.

36. **(39) In the years following the outbreak of the Black Death in England,**

37. **1** there was a sharp rise in crime as the poor in both rural and urban areas rose up against the nobility, which had mistreated them.
38. **2** many noble families lost so much money from neglected farmland that they were forced to sell it cheaply to newly rich laborers.
39. **3** the threat posed by the upwardly mobile peasant class prompted the nobility to utilize the judicial system as a means to repress them.
40. **4** many former landowners were turned down from jobs in rising industries because they lacked the skills necessary to be efficient laborers.

41. (40) How did the Black Death transform English women?

42. 1 The shortage of skilled tradesmen enabled peasant women to take on a range of jobs that had previously been off-limits.
43. 2 Authorities granted peasant women the right to rent and farm land in situations where all of their male relatives had died.
44. 3 As the old social order broke down, many noblewomen were forced to marry peasant men because their families could no longer provide for them.
45. 4 Noblewomen, most of whom had no prior work experience, had to depend on their husbands to teach them skills that would make them employable.

46. (41) What was one effect that the Black Death had on the church across England?

47. 1 Large numbers of the clergy deserted their posts in an attempt to avoid the disease, causing the church to lose numbers and influence.
48. 2 Monetary support from the noble class was lost, which drove many of the clergy to seek work elsewhere rather than accept lower wages.
49. 3 An increasing number of commoners attempting to join the clergy with hopes that a post in the church would help protect them from the disease.
50. 4 The number of members of the clergy was significantly reduced, forcing church leaders to recruit commoners to take their places.

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51. Answers for "Further Questions"



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15. **8) Why did the Catholic Church have to conduct their business in English?**
16. *Church leaders began to induct laymen who were drawn from the mostly illiterate masses.*
17. **9) What happened in 1362?**
18. *English replaced French as the official language of England.*

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